

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Engagement of Experts for Conducting a Study on EU Integration and the Role of Local Government Associations: Principles, Models, Practices and Lessons for Moldova

Ref. No.: PSGA4 – P6

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Project Title: PLATFORMA: Local and Regional International Action

Contracting Authority: Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS)

Beneficiary: Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM)

Donor: European Commission and Swiss Development Cooperation (through the NALAS Revolving Fund)

1. Background

PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of local and regional governments engaged in international cooperation for sustainable development. PLATFORMA federates local and regional governments with their national, European and global associations and is hosted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

NALAS is a network of associations of local authorities of South-East Europe (SEE). The Network brings together 14 Local Government Associations (LGAs) representing approximately 9,000 local authorities. NALAS promotes decentralization and local self-government reforms through policy dialogue, capacity development, knowledge exchange and advocacy initiatives.

In the framework of the PLATFORMA Eastern Partnership Programme, NALAS supports the institutional development and advocacy efforts of Local Government Associations in Eastern Partnership countries.

The Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) has actively supported decentralization, local governance reforms and local democracy in Moldova. As Moldova advances in its EU accession path, there is a need to better understand how LGAs can contribute to the accession process, what models have proven effective in other countries and what institutional mechanisms should be developed to maximize local government engagement.

To support evidence-based policy dialogue, NALAS and CALM will cooperate in the development of a study analysing the role of LGAs in EU integration processes, reviewing practical experiences from EU Member States and candidate countries and developing recommendations for Moldova.

The study aims to support both CALM and national authorities in strengthening the contribution of local governments to Moldova's European integration process.

2. Objective of the Assignment

The overall objective of this assignment is to develop a comprehensive study on the role of Local Government Associations in supporting EU integration processes and to formulate recommendations for strengthening the engagement of CALM and local governments in Moldova's accession process.

The specific objectives of this assignment are to:

- Analyse the role of local governments and LGAs in EU accession and implementation of the EU acquis.
- Review principles and institutional mechanisms for involving local governments in EU integration processes.
- Examine practical experiences and models from selected EU Member States and candidate countries.
- Identify successful tools, mechanisms and services provided by LGAs to support municipalities during EU integration.
- Develop recommendations for strengthening local government participation and CALM's role in Moldova's EU integration process.

3. Scope of Work

Two experts shall be engaged for the implementation of this assignment:

- Team Leader
- Key Expert

The Team Leader shall coordinate the overall assignment, ensure the methodological consistency of the study and be responsible for integrating the work of both experts into a coherent final report.

Team Leader

The Team Leader shall be responsible for:

1. Developing the analytical framework and methodology for the study.
2. Reviewing European policies and principles related to multi-level governance; subsidiarity; partnership; cohesion policy; and EU accession governance.
3. Conducting the comparative review of selected EU Member States and candidate countries.
4. Analysing institutional mechanisms through which local governments participate in EU accession processes.
5. Leading consultations with European institutions, development partners and international experts, where appropriate.

6. Drafting comparative analysis, conclusions and policy recommendations.
7. Coordinating the work of the Key Expert and ensuring quality assurance of all deliverables.
8. Preparing and presenting the final study.

Key Expert

The Key Expert shall be responsible for:

1. Analysing the current role of CALM and local governments within Moldova's EU integration process.
2. Reviewing existing NALAS, PLATFORMA, CEMR, SALAR and other relevant studies and policy papers.
3. Mapping the institutional functions and services provided by LGAs during EU accession, including: policy advocacy; legislative consultation; municipal capacity development; training; peer learning; EU funding support; project preparation; municipal EU focal point networks; communication and awareness raising.
4. Identifying gaps, challenges and opportunities for strengthening local government participation in EU integration.
5. Identifying concrete institutional models, governance arrangements and good practices that can be adapted to Moldova.
6. Conducting consultations with: CALM; municipalities; national institutions; EU Delegation; and development partners.
7. Identifying institutional gaps and opportunities for strengthening CALM's role.
8. Preparation of recommendations.

4. Deliverables

The expert team is expected to jointly deliver the following:

- Inception Report
- Draft Final Study
- Final Study
- PowerPoint presentation
- Presentation of findings

Team Leader Contributions

The Team Leader shall be primarily responsible for:

- Methodology and analytical framework
- Comparative European review
- Analysis of institutional models

- Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Final editing
- Quality assurance
- Final presentation

Key Expert Contributions

The Key Expert shall be primarily responsible for:

- Moldova baseline assessment
- Review of LGA functions and services
- Stakeholder consultations
- Mapping institutional arrangements
- Good practice collection
- Draft recommendations related to CALM
- Supporting finalisation of all deliverables

5. Indicative Outline of the Study Report

The final study report should indicatively follow the structure below (subject to refinement during the inception phase):

Executive Summary

1. Introduction: Background; Objectives; Methodology;
2. EU Integration and Local Governments: Multi-level governance; Subsidiarity and partnership principles; Role of local governments in implementing the acquis; Local governments and EU funding
3. Role of Local Government Associations in EU Integration: Conceptual framework; Functions and responsibilities of LGAs; Institutional mechanisms for participation
4. Comparative European Experiences: Bulgaria, Lithuania; Latvia; Romania; Montenegro; Additional selected case studies
5. Models and Practices for LGA Engagement: Participation in negotiations; Working groups and consultation mechanisms; Municipal EU focal point networks; Capacity-building systems; EU funding support services; Revolving funds and pre-financing mechanisms; Communication and citizen engagement

6. Recommendations and Roadmap; Recommendations for CALM: Recommendations for national authorities; Recommendations for development partners; Short-term actions; Medium-term actions; Long-term priorities

Annexes: References; Stakeholder list; Good practice examples; Summary tables

6. Location

The assignment shall be conducted in Moldova, including online and/or in-person consultations with stakeholders.

Field visits, if required, shall be agreed with NALAS and CALM. The Contracting Authority will not cover costs related to travel and accommodation separately. Such costs shall be included within the proposed financial offer.

7. Duration and Timeline

Tentative implementation period: July – October 2026.

Phase 1 Desk review and inception report.

Phase 2 Comparative analysis and stakeholder consultations.

Phase 3 Assessment of Moldova and drafting.

Phase 4 Validation, finalization and presentation.

The duration and timeline may be revised by NALAS based on implementation needs.

8. Methodology

The experts will use a mixed-method approach combining:

- Desk review of policy documents, accession frameworks and previous NALAS, PLATFORMA and CEMR publications.
- Comparative analysis of European experiences.
- Stakeholder consultations.
- Good practice identification and benchmarking.

The study will address the following key research questions:

- What role do LGAs play in supporting EU accession and implementation of the acquis?
- Which institutional models have proven most effective in EU Member States and candidate countries?
- What practical services can LGAs provide to municipalities during accession?
- How can CALM strengthen its role in Moldova's EU integration process?

- What institutional and policy changes are needed to ensure effective local government participation in accession-related reforms?

9. Required Qualifications

Qualifications for the Team Leader

Qualifications and Skills

- Advanced university degree in Public Administration, European Studies, Political Science, Law, Economics or related field.
- Excellent command of written and spoken English. Knowledge of Romanian is an asset.
- Strong analytical, facilitation and report-writing skills.

General Work Experience

- At least 10 years of relevant professional experience in Moldova

Specific Work Experience

- At least 7 years of experience in EU integration, decentralization, multi-level governance, local governance or public administration reform.
- Demonstrated experience conducting analytical studies and policy research.
- Experience working with local government associations or with EU related institutions.
- Experience with international organizations or development partners is an advantage
- Knowledge of South-East Europe and/or Eastern Partnership countries will be considered an advantage.

Qualifications for the Key Expert

Qualifications and Skills

- Advanced university degree in Public Administration, European Studies, Political Science, Law, Economics or related field.
- Excellent command of written and spoken English and Romanian.
- Strong analytical, facilitation and report-writing skills.

General Work Experience

- At least 10 years of relevant professional experience in Moldova.

Specific Work Experience

- At least 7 years of experience in decentralization local governance, municipal capacity development, policy advocacy, EU integration, or public administration reform.

- Demonstrated experience conducting analytical assessments and studies
- Strong understanding of Moldova's local government system.
- Experience with international organizations or development partners is an advantage
- Knowledge of South-East Europe and/or Eastern Partnership countries will be considered an advantage.

10. Reporting and Supervision

The Expert will report to the designated NALAS Programme Manager.

The Expert will work in close coordination with representatives of CALM and the PLATFORMA Secretariat throughout the implementation of the assignment.

11. Budget

The maximum budget available for the Team Leader is EUR 2,000 (VAT excluded), and the maximum budget available for the Key Expert is EUR 2,000 (VAT excluded).

Payments will be made based on acceptance of deliverables by NALAS. No accrual costs will be accepted.

Payment shall be made as follows:

30% upon approval of the Inception Report.

40% upon approval of the Draft Final Report.

30% upon approval of the Final Report and Presentation.

12. Modification of Terms

NALAS reserves the right to adjust the scope, timeline and deliverables of the assignment based on evolving implementation needs and circumstances.